

Poem for Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan ending in a beginning

Yours is the music of quiet 4am, of solitary afternoons that seem unending. Yours the music of desire, the exhale of the Urdu word for 'need', like the sound of a lung first learning breath. Yours the shape of my father's mouth turning into song. Yours the voice of sandpaper and husk, like the call for God coming out of a garbage truck throat. Yours the voice of surrender, surrender, surrender to the longing of the living, to all bottomless need to be filled, to find another, to be whole. Yours the poet's knowledge of how to moan a word, yours the low humming of all the world's restless stirring. Yours the yearning, the always and forever yearning, yours the trembling lips of a muted string waiting to burst into passion. Yours the hunger of a fakir who has forsaken begging to shout from the rooftops. Yours the sweet wine of grief, the unbridled intoxication which you deliver like a lover's return. Yours the lust. Yours the notes that land like a hand tapping on the tight drumskin of my heart, then the strum of the harmonica which struggles to keep up with your voice soaring into the sky. Yours the utterance of devotion, yours the prophet's chant, yours the treacherous winding road harmony, yours the fevered ecstasy. Yours a wild animal wail from before words, the sound of the soul freed of the ribcage, from some ancient deep forgotten history, yours every exuberant end yours every troubled beginning.

Pooja Nansi

Tell me the Story

There's so many Bombays I do not know will not know would die to know but could never know even if I time travelled, whiskey marveled, mused unsettled, left untitled, even if I puzzled over, battled with every punctuation pause in every family story and said no no wait no hold on what happened before that and then where did they walk to how fast did they walk and what year was this how high in the sky was the sun beating down or did moonson soak their conversation and who heard them and how did you find out are there any photos any telegrams and could we call Raman Masi and find out if she remembers her name alright fine what colour was her dress and what did she have for breakfast and I know they fell in love that day but was it on a stomach filled with toast and eggs and no I do not know the Cathedral of the Holy Name oh was it the church we passed in Colaba but did it look the same when they stood in front of it in what year did you say it was in that record store in Kala Ghoda where we went childhoods ago to buy cassette tapes playing those Mohd Rafi songs those sad longing songs so much sad longing I thought it would flood the streets that you walked when you were eighteen and you are now sixty three and the record store is closed but we can still go to the Cathedral of the Holy Name I don't know the bends on the streets and where is this Bombay of my father's young man dreams how many right turns before I get there , no no wait no hold on what happened next?

Pooja Nansi